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Oklahoma Independents Support Redistricting Reform

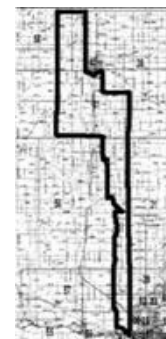
The Oklahoma Coalition of Independents supports Rep. Ryan McMullen's (D-Burns Flat) recent call to allow Oklahomans to vote on an Independent Redistricting Commission. Consider the limited voter choice offered to Oklahoma voters and the large margin of victories in many races.

- Half of all state legislative seats (62 of 125) went **unopposed** in the 2006 general election. Surprisingly, this is the recent average for midterm elections.
- Three-quarters of legislative primaries go **unopposed** (www.okies.info/needchoice.html).
- The recent average margin of victory for state Senate races in general elections was an astounding **28%**. This is close to Henry's "landslide" 33% victory, but is the norm for Senate races.
- The average margin of victory for state House races in Nov. 2006 was **24%**.

Why would so many races go unopposed? Why would the margin of victory be so wide? The answer is simple: **partisan gerrymanders**.

When district lines are drawn by politicians, this allows them to pick which voters will live in their district. Uncompetitive districts are often a result. A fairer system would put the power of drawing districts in someone else's hands. That is why twelve states and many other countries already use Independent Redistricting Commissions to keep politicians from drawing their own districts.

Examples of stretched and contorted districts in Oklahoma are easy to come by. For example, House District 41 snakes from Yukon to north of Enid, and in areas is only six miles wide.



At the national level, it is clear how redistricting often works to limit voter choice. According to Spencer Overton, author of *Stealing Democracy*: "Following the 2000 Census, 49 competitive congressional districts were significantly redrawn. 92% of incumbents representing these areas obtained safer districts and only 8% received more competitive districts."

Rep. McMullen's plan would call for "competitiveness" to be a consideration when drawing districts. He said, "80 House Districts are virtually safe from any kind of legitimate challenge from a member of a different party. That's not how democracy is supposed to work! "Competitiveness" combined with an Independent Commission should provide Oklahoma a far more representative legislature and congressional delegation."

Rep. McMullen's plan would allow Oklahomans to vote on forming an Independent Redistricting Commission. It would be composed of six voting members who are retired Oklahoma judges – three appointed by a Democratic governor and three by a Republican governor. He offered his plan as an amendment, which was defeated largely along party lines.

OKIES Edmond Coordinator, Richard Prawdzienski, reacted to the Rep. McMullen's defeated amendment saying, "Republicans refusal to change in effect tells the Democrats 'it is now get even time' and tells us 'it's party first, citizens second'."

Lynn Howell, state Chairman of Common Cause Oklahoma, commented on the current system: "Voters don't choose politicians – politicians choose voters. It's no wonder 60% of voting age Oklahomans stay home in mid-term elections."

Rep. McMullen is not the only one calling for reform. He said that Gov. Brad Henry, Senator Owen Laughlin (R-Woodward), and state Rep. John Trebilcock (R-Broken Arrow), have all expressed support for an Independent Redistricting Commission. Senator Kenneth Corn (D-Poteau) has also offered his own bill (SJR 12) to allow Oklahomans to vote on forming an Independent Redistricting Commission. In drawing districts, it would have members of the commission take into consideration "population, compactness, area, political units, historical precedents, economic and political interests and contiguous territory."

The Oklahoma Coalition of Independents (OKIES) supports greater voter choice and policies that give voters a stronger say in government.

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